

## The Daily Bread of Life

Feed your household with the bread that endures to eternal life.  
Feast on the words of God and works of Jesus.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

### The Potter Knows Best

This week, as we look at God's command to repent, we have to ask who is really doing the work of repentance here. God puts it on us, and says that he will forgive if we repent. Our Lutheran ears perk up at this, and we may ask why God is making his free gift love sound so conditional. We need to remember two things. First, God certainly does not forgive the sins of those who continue to love their sins—they remain condemned. Second, the repentance that God demands is really something that he also shapes in us. As we consider God's command to repent, watch for the ways that he is shaping that repentance in his people. So then, it can be said that forgiveness is free, because we don't actually do anything to get it. The only "condition" is repentance, which is actually something that God works in us.

#### The Text

Jeremiah 18:1-6

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. <sup>4</sup> But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. <sup>5</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup> "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."

## Keys to Understanding

**The potter:** a lump of clay is spun on a wheel while the potter uses his hands to fashion the clay into a pot, pitcher, jar, etc.

**My message.** It is always good to take these opportunities to remember that this message is from God, and is not something to be blown off.

**Marred.** some defect in the clay. In this comparison, the defect stands for our sin.

**Formed it into another pot.** The potter decided that the defect can't be fixed gently. The pot needs to be smashed back into a ball and reformed.

**As it seemed best to him.** the potter is the expert, and he is free to do as he thinks best with this lump of clay so that the product will be excellent.

## Keys to Applying

God can do as he sees fit with his people Israel. If they need to be destroyed and rebuilt, he will do that just like the potter did with his clay.

What God said of Israel applies also to any Christian church in any place and any time. If the church fails to be what it is supposed to be in faithfully representing God's Word and administering the means of grace, God may destroy it and raise up a new group to be a new church.

This is also true about the individual Christian—if your heart becomes "marred," God may decide that you need to be crushed so that he can "reform" you again into the person he desires.

When God destroys, we must remember that he does this so that he may build up again—just like the potter's goal is to make a better pot. The situation would otherwise be hopeless, marred beyond repair. In his wisdom as the Master Potter, he knows when to destroy and start over. By destroying, he is able to build up something new and better.

## Questions

1. Have you been tempted lately to think that God doesn't know what he is doing?
2. How can it be that God is doing right, though it seems so unfair to us?

Even if we understand that God brings destruction in order to remind the world of his judgment, we tend to be indignant when it happens to us personally. Do any of us really believe that we need God's chastisement for our sin? We do, and God knows best. We shouldn't need to understand why the things God is doing are right, as long as we trust that he is doing right.

## Because we are Lutherans...

From the **Smalcald Articles**, Martin Luther's confession of faith:

This, then, is the thunderbolt by means of which God with one blow destroys both open sinners and false saints. He allows no one to justify himself. He drives all together into terror and despair. This is the hammer of which Jeremiah speaks, "Is not my word like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29).<sup>1</sup>

Repentance is something that God works in a person as he crushes with his Law, and also provides his promises of hope and forgiveness in the Gospel.

## Bible Story

### *The Flood*

Genesis 6

1. What danger would there have been for Noah's family and their faith if God had let the world continue to become more and more evil?
2. Explain that it was good for God to show us that he really is serious about punishing sin.
3. Explain how the Flood teaches us to trust God's promise to forgive and save those who are sorrowful for their sins and listen to God like Noah did.

## In Liturgy and Song

Use these hymn verses as a closing prayer.

203:1,3

Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word;  
Curb those who by deceit or sword  
Would seek to overthrow your Son  
And to destroy what he has done.

O Comforter of priceless worth,  
Send peace and unity on earth.  
Support us in our final strife,  
And lead us out of death to life.

In this song, we pray that God would do his work as "the Potter" who shapes us into people who listen to his Word and obey him.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. 1959 (T. G. Tappert, Ed.) (304). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

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## God Shapes People

### The Text

Jeremiah 18:7-10

<sup>7</sup> If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be **uprooted, torn down** and **destroyed**,<sup>8</sup> and if that nation I warned **repents** of its evil, then I will **relent** and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.<sup>9</sup> And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted,<sup>10</sup> and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

### Keys to Understanding

**At any time:** God presents this reformation as a real possibility at any time, which he will bring as he sees fit.—so don't think that it's never going to happen!

**Uprooted, torn down, destroyed**  
Three different terms for destruction, all telling that the former nation or kingdom will not be around anymore.

**Repents** Literally, "turns from its evil." Repentance, in this case, means stopping the evil that they had been doing and doing what is right instead.

**Relent** God doesn't change his mind like we do, but he does sometimes

### Keys to Applying

God sets up his terms: either repent or be destroyed. Because God wants sinners to turn from their wickedness and love and obey him, he doesn't let them continue merrily on their way to hell. God makes life miserable in order to encourage repentance.

What God said to Israel applies to us when we consider our personal Christian life. God reserves the right to form us as a potter forms the clay. God may decide that he needs to "reform" us, personally, by crushing our sinful pride with worries and disasters so that we come running back to him. Then he builds us up with his love and mercy again in Word and Sacrament, so that we are a new pot, better than before.

We may sometimes feel that we do not deserve the disasters that God sends into our lives. There may not be some particularly bad sin for which we need to repent, but there is always a need for repentance. We are naturally

make his will conditional upon what we do. i.e. "If they do this, then I will do that." | sinful people, and we need to live a life of repentance.

## Questions

1. What is our natural reaction when God sends disaster?
2. Why repent? Why not curse God for demanding such perfection even though we have been born sinful? Why not curse him for punishing sins that we can't avoid? The answer is that he has promised forgiveness to those who listen to him and turn away from their sins.
3. How sinful are we, if we do not recognize that our sin deserves disaster, and resist God's hand when he sends troubles to remind us of how serious our sinful condition is?

God leads us to repentance by crushing us in our sinful pride, and by giving us the promise that he is ready to forgive if we will only turn away from our sinful ways and listen to him.

## Because we are Lutherans...

### 95 theses, Thesis 1

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ commanded "Repent," he willed that our entire life be one of repentance.

We understand that we want to live in God's grace and forgiveness. We may, however, forget that this means we must live in repentance, because God doesn't forgive those who continue to love their sins. We must live in repentance, always hating our sin and turning away from it, and always seeking to obey God's will because of the forgiveness he has given.

## Bible Story

# *The Ninevites Repent*

Jonah 3

1. The people of Nineveh showed their sorrow for their sin, and God did not destroy their city.
2. What would have happened to Nineveh if they had been proud, and refused to listen to God?
3. Explain how this should be an encouragement for us to turn away from our sins and look to God for forgiveness.

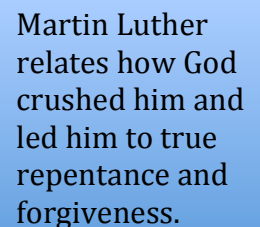
## In Liturgy and Song

377:2-4

2 Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay; Death brooded darkly o'er me.  
Sin was my torment night and day; In sin my mother bore me.  
Yet deep and deeper still I fell; Life had become a living hell,  
So firmly sin possessed me.

3 My own good works availed me naught, No merit they attaining;  
My will against God's judgment fought, No hope for me remaining.  
My fears increased till sheer despair Left naught but death to be my share  
And hell to be my sentence.

4 But God beheld my wretched state Before the world's foundation,  
And, mindful of his mercies great, He planned my soul's salvation.  
A Father's heart he turned to me, Sought my redemption fervently;  
He gave his dearest treasure.



Martin Luther relates how God crushed him and led him to true repentance and forgiveness.

## Prayer

Like Martin Luther, in true repentance we learn to hate our sinfulness and give up on any way of justifying ourselves. Luther learned to pray this simple prayer of repentance:

I am yours, Lord. Save me. Amen.

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### God Goal Repentance, Not Punishment

#### The Text

Jeremiah 18:11

“Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a **disaster** for you and devising a plan against you. So **turn from your evil ways**, each one of you, and **reform** your ways and your actions.’”

#### Keys to Understanding

**disaster** The Babylonian captivity, see Jeremiah 25:1-14, 39:1-18

**reform** think of the potter again. God wants us to be crushed and turn back to him again like a reformed pot.

#### Keys to Applying

God’s goal is to keep his people close to him and teach them to be like him, so that he will not have to destroy them forever in hell. He warns of disaster so that they will hopefully turn away from evil and do what is good. The people of Judah and Jerusalem did not, and so their country was destroyed by the Babylonian army. Even through that destruction, though, the goal was to reform them into a people who would be eager to do God’s will. God planned to bring them back to himself so that, once again, they would not be destroyed forever in hell.

God calls for a reformation here, but whose work is it really? Yes, we may turn from our sins and obey him, but we have seen how it is his work all along to crush our sinful pride and then give us a promise of forgiveness so that we will turn and obey him. God is the one who shapes our repentant life.

## Questions

1. Where do you see God's goodness in these verses?
2. How can you see God's goodness in every calamity that comes into your life?

Ever since the Garden of Eden, God has been explaining that life will be miserable because of sin. So, any time disaster happens, we should remember our sin and be driven to repentance. Now, since a repentant life is a life that is close to God, we can understand that God is being loving when he drives us to repent.

## Because we are Lutherans...

**From the Smalcald Articles**, Martin Luther's confession of faith:

This is what the beginning of true repentance is like. Here man must hear such a judgment as this: "You are all of no account. Whether you are manifest sinners or saints, you must all become other than you now are and do otherwise than you now do, no matter who you are and no matter how great, wise, mighty, and holy you may think yourselves. Here no one is godly," etc.

To this ... the New Testament immediately adds the consoling promise of grace in the Gospel. This is to be believed, as Christ says in Mark 1:15, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," which is to say, "Become different, do otherwise, and believe my promise."<sup>2</sup>

## Bible Story

### *The Fall of Jerusalem*

Jeremiah 39:1-18

1. Note that the siege lasted for 1.5 years. The Babylonian army forced them out of the city by cutting off their food.
2. Note that even the temple was destroyed, showing that God had temporarily rejected his people.
3. God explains in verse 16 that this happened because the people had refused to repent.
4. Explain that God is serious about our sin, and he wants us to be sorrowful and strive to do better. If we do not, terrible things may happen to us too.
5. Recall that God promised forgiveness for those who are sorrowful over their sins and obey what he says.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. 1959 (T. G. Tappert, Ed.) (304). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.



## In Liturgy and Song

382:2

When darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace;  
In ev'ry high and stormy gale My anchor holds within the veil.  
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.

Troubles and guilt can be like darkness hiding God's love from us, but his promises of forgiveness are our "solid rock" to reassure us that God is with us.

## Prayer

Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.  
Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.  
Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity. Amen.

(Psalm 51:7-9)